

2024 Judd's Hill Poetry Contest Judge Leza Lowitz:

Over the years, we have read hundreds of poems about wine. Writing such a poem is harder than you think! This year's winning poem is "Above Atsitsa Bay" by Katharyn Howd Machan. We appreciated the crisp sensuality of this poem, beautifully rendered in classical sonnet form. The rhyme scheme was creative and fresh. We were also impressed by the skillful interplay of imagery from the natural world, the world of Greek mythology, and the human realm. In the end, it all comes down to unabashed praise we can all relate to: "such good wine!" Well done.

Above Atsitsa Bay

by Katharyn Howd Machan

On Skyros I have picked and tasted fruit
left wild to ripen in long days of sun,
each gangly branch, each rutted, twisted root
a tribute to what ancient gods have done
to make this place a haven throughout time:
sweet apricots, firm apples, pale nuts strong
and rich in curving shells, and—most sublime—
figs bursting ripe to welcome wasps' soft song.
And what of humans' gifts to this old land?
What god besides Athena do they praise?
Beside their goats do farmers lift a hand
to offer grapes that gleam through summer days?
Oh, yes—I've drunk the harvest of their vine
that honors Dionysius: such good wine!

Grapes

by Katharyn Howd Machan

Who will nurture good black earth
where we have set new vines?

*Gaia, in all her age.
Gaia with eyes open wide
to weep for her lost sons.*

Who will rain upon the old
as they launch tendrilled leaves?

*Zeus, in a gentle storm.
Zeus, with careful kingly hands
holding back his spears.*

Who will bless the small hard green
that swells in hanging bunches?

*Demeter, her fingers full of love.
Demeter, with her daughter here
still free of Hades' hunger.*

Who will call full purple forth
to brighten dusky skins?

*Helios, in golden glory.
Helios who gives the sky
its warming brilliant light.*

Who will pluck and press sweet fruit
and drink its sun-touched splendor?

*Dionysius! Dionysius!
Join him dancing through the vineyard
and dare to taste his wine!*

Go Wild

by Katharyn Howd Machan

Season says it.

Season swells.

*Let the light between your loins
reach to every lantern.*

Wine calls.

Wine defines all hours.

*Grapes declare why they are purple,
the color of hot blood.*

Greeks, Phoenicians, Romans, all
who understand the sea's high sun:
*dance and couple, touch the curves
of human bodies' need.*

Music makes it.

Music moves.

*Air beneath, above and under
whirls the breath of love.*

Would You Like?

by Donna Meares

“Would you like to get me a glass of water?” she asks.

“You don’t look helpless to me,” he answers.

“I was just wondering,” she continues.

“I’m so comfy reading Billy Collins’s poems,
but I am a bit thirsty.”

Five minutes later, she asks,

“Would you mind turning on the fan?

I’m so . . . hot.”

A laugh is his reply, but he seems to be reconsidering.

“Would you like for me to bring you a goblet of chilled Chardonnay?” he says,
grinning as he rises from his chair.

She smiles. “It must be five o’clock somewhere.”

Late Summer on Lake Rollins

by Donna Meares

Evening, mid-August.

My Seiko's hands line straight to Roman numeral VI.

Summer's cut short—

students called back to school before any hint of fall's amber.

The lake is relinquished to us once more,

the water, a looking glass for the sun's yawning shimmer

before it beds beneath the covers of the ridge.

Our old boat hums in the no-wake zone.

At the wheel, my husband, perched on the back of the captain's seat, grins into the wind,

his eyes scanning the narrow passage through the shoreline hills

to open waters, his hand

ready to thrust the throttle full speed.

My eyes take in his profile, a determined set to his jaw,

aviators resting on his nose, white hair ruffling

beneath his "Waffle House Regulars" cap—

his good-old-boy memento from our Georgia upbringing.

He prides it in California.

Entering big basin, he revs the motor, laying a smooth silver highway.

Our daughters should be here, spraying up fine rooster tails.

No skiing tonight, though. Just a quick U-turn

to retrieve his favorite cap blown off into the lake.

Stretching, reaching, missing, laughing, we repeat,

then cross our fingers for finding anchorage in a secluded cove.

We're in luck. Our Danforth drags sixty feet of rode into the lagoon's part-shaded, part-sun-setting, green waters.

A dive, some laps around the boat,

and we're ready to dangle our feet off the transom, pour two goblets

of Chardonnay, swirl it gently, toast the purpling sky.

Appetites whetted, we place the picnic basket on the table in the bow,

pull out barbecued baby backs, fried okra, and coleslaw—

the good-old-gal's homage to her hometown's cooking.

Sun's last rays filter through oaks and evergreens. An osprey circles.

We weigh anchor under a rising white crescent, putter

marina-bound, trying to lengthen the shortening day.

"Life's good," my husband tells me—his favorite California motto,

as we bump each other's knuckles.

Wine Country Wedding Toast

by Donna Meares

I lift a toast to the love that fills this room--
to all of you, who, in some way,
have touched the lives of this young couple
 through your words,
 through your deeds,
 through your sharing.

Like the May sun
that brings forth flowers
and the fruit upon the vine,
My wish to you, my daughter and our new son,
is that love will always nurture you
and that your marriage will be blessed
by the wondrous man
who turned water into wine.

The Night Before my Father Died

by Joan Shearer

My father loved wine
& scotch
@ 91 on his death bed
unable to talk

I dipped the sponge swab
into the wine I'd brought from home
gently I pressed upon his lips
the nectar he claimed responsible
for his longevity. resveratrol, he'd say

awakened by the long forgotten
sense of taste
he sucked and slurped
writhing, begging for more

those in the room laughed
except for me. I didn't laugh
I sorrowed as I fed him
again and again and again

walking the vineyard
by Victor Pearn

the grape clumps
deep purple
fully mature
small and sweet
in the warm california sun

this could be a fine wine
might be fat with sugar like
a schoolyard filled with playful children
pulling the cork an aroma
will be sweet will be red

in anticipation of
if they could be

filling your glass might be
changed into silvery blue or pink butterflies
lighting gently upon the tongue
a burst of sweetness with pleasure
a flavor everlasting to savor

walking the vineyard
you already know this